



Different by Nature.

2008 ICCA Best Marketing Award Submission

“Planes, Trains, and Convention Centers” *Salt Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau*

Salt Lake is “Different by Nature.” We admit it—we’re different. Just the way our nature intended.

Salt Lake is a unique fusion of metropolitan city and quaint mountain town; the towering Wasatch Mountains embrace Salt Lake and offer a dramatic backdrop to the vibrancy and activities of downtown.

The Wasatch Mountains offer pristine wilderness hiking and mountain biking in the summer and spectacular skiing and snowboarding in the winter; located a short 30- to 40-minute drive from the city’s center, it is truly nature’s wonderland for locals and visitors alike.

With all it has to offer, Salt Lake is a first-class meeting destination. Amenities include the Salt Palace Convention Center with 675,000 square feet of meeting space, 6,400 hotel rooms within walking distance of the convention center, 140+ restaurants and nightclubs in the downtown area, an outdoor shopping mall with over 130 restaurants and shops located in the heart of the convention district, light-rail transportation serving the convention center and surrounding hotels, four ski resorts within a 35-minute drive, and one-of-a-kind outdoor accessibility.

But even considering all of these features, how can Salt Lake market itself to stand out among our peers in the convention and meeting industry? The answer to this question was the challenge posed to the Salt Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau in addressing the 2008 MPI World Education Congress held in Las Vegas, Nevada.

The ability to differentiate our city from not only the thousands of other meeting destinations in the United States and around the world, but also be able to “stand out” amongst all the activity happening in Las Vegas, was the ultimate test!

With this in mind, the Salt Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau, host of the 2009 MPI WEC event, endeavored to “think outside the box” and create a humorous and informative promotional video to entertain and engage the audience at the closing lunch event. The audience was composed of meeting planners from around the world, who are accustomed to seeing the polished and slick promotional materials that every meeting destination has developed for their sales and marketing efforts.

The final video, titled “Planes, Trains, and Convention Centers,” was a memorable, unconventional, quirky, and unique method of communicating Salt Lake’s assets as a meetings destination to this remarkably influential group of meeting planners and decision-makers that make up Meeting Professionals International.

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The Salt Lake CVB was not attempting to “one-up” Las Vegas. Las Vegas is arguably the “entertainment capital of the world,” and we had to find a way to capture the audience’s attention, stand out, and entertain in a memorable fashion.

Our goal was to convey the traditional list of meeting destination features in a new and engaging way that would stick in the minds of meeting planners. What we learned in the process, and the lesson others can take away from this example, is that in today’s media-rich environment, how you communicate your message can be equally if not more important than what makes up your message. Humor and originality were critical elements in addressing this serious crowd of meeting planners, and taking an unexpected approach was the most important decision we made in creating a buzz about Salt Lake.

In addition, the opportunity to address this crowd of thousands of influential decision makers allowed us to dispel common misconceptions held about Salt Lake, such as:

- It is difficult to find an alcoholic drink in Utah;
- Salt Lake’s convention and meeting infrastructure is too small to host a large meeting; and
- Salt Lake lacks quality in their convention and meetings infrastructure.

It was important for us to address these long-held myths about Salt Lake, and the way they were addressed in the conversation between the promotional video’s two characters was both amusing and direct.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

The Salt Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau conceived the idea of creating an original and compelling promotional video to be presented at the closing lunch event of MPI’s 2008 World Education Congress. Salt Lake’s overall theme for the luncheon was to showcase the many successful films shot on location in the State of Utah, and to open the eyes and minds of thousands of meeting planners to a destination that is not as unfamiliar as they might think.

With the concept of movies and film already a part of the event’s theme, Scott Beck, President and CEO of the Salt Lake CVB, was inspired by a scene from the film “Planes, Trains, and Automobiles” as a way to stage a conversation between a stressed-out meeting planner and an overly enthusiastic receptionist in the front office of the Salt Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Through continued discussion with Brent Pribil, Cornerstone Audio Visual, and John Farr, Creative Media Group, the original model was modified to incorporate a current,

hip visual style inspired by the television show “The Office.” Working with this premise, the production created one-on-one interviews between the characters and the camera.

In order to determine which elements of Salt Lake’s meetings portfolio to address in the video presentation, we researched our Lost Business Reports to identify key elements as to why we were losing convention and meeting business to other cities. We looked to our Customer Advisory Board members for details on their hurdles in booking meetings in Salt Lake, and also the responses they received from their peers to the concept of meeting in Salt Lake.

The information we collected regarding the perceptions, skepticism and doubts that exist about Salt Lake were addressed in the original one-and-a-half page script created for the two characters. The one-on-one camera interviews and development of the unique personalities of the characters were ad-libbed by our two actors, and subsequently added a tremendous amount of humor to the final product.

The final production is a fantastic and funny piece that addresses the importance of the meeting planners’ responsibilities, and allowed us to poke a little fun at Salt Lake’s unusual character while simultaneously answering meeting planners’ concerns and dispelling misconceptions.

OBJECTIVES AND EVALUATIONS

Our main objective with the “Planes, Trains, and Convention Centers” video presentation was simple: to entertain the audience, and at the same time, have them walk away having learned one or two new things about Salt Lake. We achieved our goal of getting the audience to laugh, and they were entertained enough that the attendees stayed for the entire presentation!

We also achieved the goal of presenting Salt Lake as a memorable destination, as evidenced by the overwhelmingly positive written feedback our sales team has received from our clients, the numerous anecdotal responses we’ve received from individuals not affiliated with the event or the meetings industry, the increasing number of views the video is receiving on YouTube.com, and a 12% increase in website visits to the www.MeetInSaltLake.com microsite (compared to the week previous to the lunch event.)

CONCLUSION

“Planes, Trains, and Convention Centers” has become a brilliant and surprising marketing piece for our staff to share with our clients and peers. The “desk lady” receptionist featured in the video has unintentionally and unexpectedly become the pseudo-spokesperson for the Salt Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau. We intend to capitalize on this by incorporating her character into the marketing campaign currently being developed for MPI WEC 2009, as well as in future sales and marketing strategies for the Salt Lake CVB.

Ultimately, the video was produced with a strategy focused on attracting thousands of meeting planners to Salt Lake for the MPI World Education Congress next July. We feel

that we have created an energetic and positive buzz for Salt Lake through this video presentation. We expect the excitement will translate into record attendance at next year's convention where we will have the opportunity, to once again, demonstrate to this group that Salt Lake is "Different By Nature."